

THEME VS. MORAL

When responding to literature, theme and moral are often used interchangeably. However, while a theme generally informs the moral, they are two very distinct elements. Neither the theme nor moral mentions the story's characters, setting, or events, but they both reveal the implicit or didactic (intending to instruct) messages found within the text.

IS IT THE STORY'S THEME? IS IT A MORAL?

THEME

A theme, also known as a topic or subject matter, is a continued thread of meaning throughout a story; often, it indicates what's happening, adding complexity and value to the storyline. Sometimes, there are multiple themes determined through the character's actions and thoughts, as well as through symbols and other literary motifs present.

Examples:

- Overcoming self-doubt
- Dealing with the death of a loved one
- The benefits of having gratitude
- The need for perseverance



MORAL

The moral, also known as life lesson, universal truth, or central message, tells us what to believe about the culmination of the story's events; it also tells us what to believe concerning the theme(s). Sometimes the story may contain more than one moral, but more often, there is just one. A moral can be discovered by analyzing the story's resolution, by the outcome of the characters' actions, by the epiphany and transformation of a character, or by a reflection given by the narrator at the story's end. Sometimes, a story doesn't have a moral, and is simply told for story's sake.

Examples:

- We can push through our self-doubt and succeed.
- Finding joy after the loss of a loved one honors the one lost.
- Gratitude for what we already have invites added blessings.
- Everyone will face obstacles that require perseverance.